

Wrestling Perspective

• Analysis & Commentary From The McLaughlin Group of Professional Wrestling •

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It's hard to believe, but with this issue, Wrestling Perspective has reached its second anniversary. When we first considered writing a monthly newsletter about wrestling, our mutual love, we decided that we would do our best to publish something worthwhile. There were several good newsletters already on the market, but we believed we could add something special, something different and something that made our readers think about what they were seeing on television and at the arenas in a different light. We can honestly say that after two years, we have lived up to that goal.

First, we would like to thank the newsletters editors who have supported us over the past two years with their advice, plugs and words of praise and encouragement. Second, we would like to thank our contributors who write some of the best and most insightful material in the industry. Finally, and most importantly, we wish to acknowledge our readers for being interested in what's on our minds. Without your support, we wouldn't exist. We've had our ups and downs this year, but we believe our product has consistently improved with each issue. We are certain that will continue for many more months and years to come. Below, we along with Vic Stanley, a frequent contributor to Wrestling Perspective, have listed our year end selections in 12 categories we believe are important in wrestling. Once again, thank you for your support.

Wrestler Of The Year

Dave: Ric Flair. Flair spent the summer months of 1991 out of a job. But, instead of spending the rest of his life bitter about WCW's decision to fire him, he bounced back. Flair quickly rebounded when he signed with the WWF and brought some life back into the promotion. With a new company and a renewed push, Flair showed us why he is considered one of the all-time greats. Flair represents everything that is good in wrestling: solid work, consistency, enthusiasm and a drive to be the best. Lex Luger finishes in second place. Luger showed he has what it takes to be a world champion. His skills in many areas improved from last year. He had great matches with Barry Windham, Ron Simmons and Rick Steiner in 1991. It's indeed unfortunate that he will sit out his year. Finishing in third place is Windham, who showed in 1991 that when he wants to be, he is among the best workers in the business. I expect many more great things from him this year.

Paul: Ric Flair. Though there are many arguments against Flair winning this award, none supersede the arguments for him winning it. Still the best wrestler in the game, his matches in WCW at the beginning of the year were the brightest part of the card. His subsequent firing proved to be what was needed to ignite WCW and the WWF. Before he even stepped into a WWF ring, it was obvious to even the most casual fan that he was something special. His matches with Hulk Hogan have been the best the WWF has seen in a long time. While his matches with Roddy Piper proved how much Piper has lost since 1983, it also showed how great Flair is to pull out a three star match with a shell. Flair's departure also forced WCW to turn the corner and look for someone else as their flagship.

While their methodology was disgraceful at best, they are finally trying to accomplish that goal. Indeed, Flair was the most important wrestler of 1991 in terms of performance, ability, interview and effect. Second place goes Jumbo Tsuruta as he is still All Japan's most important wrestler and somehow pulls out great matches night after night. A solid performer. Bobby Eaton gets third place, as he is just so talented, so good, but so misused. The last quarter of 1991 and the past several weeks have shown he just may get the treatment he deserves. That alone could catapult him to number one next year.

Vic Stanley: Rick Rude and Ricky Steamboat. Both of them had the guts to tell Vince McMahon where to stuff it and have re-emerged in WCW, establishing a renewed credibility both to themselves and to the organization. Two world class worker who are the cream of the crop. Cactus Jack comes in second as he does it his way. No other big man even attempts the death defying moves that are Jack's speciality. The most convincingly insane wrestler since Mad Dog Vachon in his prime. In my book, that counts for a lot. A long shot is Ron Simmons and many people will disagree. But, look at it this way, if he won the WCW title, and nobody came any closer, he would have placed high on most fans' lists. His mid-year title campaign was well deserved and he should have beaten Lex Luger at least once for the title last year. The time is right for the first major black champion and nobody is more deserving than Simmons.

Tag Team Of The Year

Dave: Legion Of Doom. Hawk and Animal win this one by default. Their competition either broke up in 1991 or were a team for only a short time. When the year started, it looked like the Steiners were going to run away with this award, but an injury to Scott Steiner forced them out of action for half of the year. Still I have to give them second place. Other teams suffering injuries that could have vied for the top spot include: the Rockers and Hiro Hase and Kensuke Sasaki. Doom, a top contender for this award last year, broke up in February. Other top contender including Arn Anderson and Bobby Eaton and Ricky Steamboat and Dustin Rhodes have only been together for a couple of months. Finishing in third are the Freebirds, who worked several good matches in 1991.

Paul: Legion of Doom. While their strongest competition were either hurt or broke up, they nonetheless put in solid performances night after night. Though not the most exciting or even the top drawing tag team, a position they certainly held at one point and time, they are still entertaining. When matched with the right opponents, they have good, and sometimes great matches. The Rockers come in second place. Despite Shawn Michaels injury, they were the most gifted team in the United States. They had great matches, their timing was rivaled only by the Midnight Express, Rock and Roll Express and the original Fantastics, and they have a certain charisma. Their break up, while intriguing, was much like Doom's, it just wasn't the right time. The Steiners get third as their matches with Lex Luger and Sting, Hiro Hase and Kensuke Sasaki and Hase and Masa Chono were the top three tag team matches of the year.

Vic: The Nasty Boys. These guys paid their dues in every major promotion. One of my most vivid wrestling memories was back in the AWA when Sags knocked out his own front tooth by flying into a metal corner post. Good workers, interesting, funny and obnoxious heels who are ideal for the cartoonish WWF. The Rockers come in second as the most cohesive, athlete and exciting team in recent history. Naturally, Vince McMahon chose to split them up. Neither the Rockers nor the Nasty Boys deserve to be playing second fiddle to the Legion of Doom, who are at least five years past their prime. Rounding out the top three are the Enforcers. Nothing fancy, just two tough as nails pros from the old school. Steady, strong, consistent workers and great interviews. They truly understood the tag team philosophy and were fitting champions.

Most Improved Wrestler Of The Year

Dave: Cactus Jack. Unlike the Tag Team of the Year award, this prize was hotly contested among at least half a dozen wrestlers. But Jack has to win it for his remarkable improvement during the past year. Prior to 1991, he ranked as one of the top rising stars in the business. But since his return to WCW, he has proven to be among the elite in wrestling. His matches against Sting were top-notch and he actually made Van Hammer look good in several bouts. Finishing second is Steve Austin. Many say that Austin is the next Ric Flair and after seeing him work this year, it's hard to disagree with that statement. Austin edges out Dustin Rhodes, who finishes third in this category. Although Rhodes receives a tremendous push from his father, he deserves it. For such a young wrestler, he shows incredible skill and ring presence.

Paul: Steve Austin. Simply amazing. Within two years, he has risen from a promising rookie to a credible World Television Champion. Though the dismissal of Lady Blossom could have hurt his charisma, as they were an amazing pair, Austin continued to provide ring work that supersede WCW's chosen flagship veterans Lex Luger, Sting and the Steiner Brothers. The next Ric Flair? Only if he chooses to level off at that plateau. Dustin Rhodes is just like Austin and perhaps the only thing hindering his career is the same man who is pushing him. While his push is well deserved, he does need time to develop, much as Barry Windham did in the early eighties. In fact, Dustin has many of the same qualities as Windham and that says a lot. Coming in third, Brian Pillman. Sure he was good, but this year, when allowed to show it, he proved he is a top flight worker who deserves a solid push. From the War Games to his bouts with Jushin Liger, he showed tremendous development since 1990.

Vic: Dustin Rhodes. He didn't ridden on daddy's coattails as much as he could have, although he went far too long before taking a clean pinfall. Displays motivation, determination, ring skills and savvy well beyond his years. He should be allowed to develop at his own pace. I just hope he doesn't become a parody of his old man. He should drop the hammy bionic elbow to the head. Shawn Michaels gets second place, although he was already great. Maybe he will be allowed to make a bigger impact as a solo. In third place, Steve Austin. Previously a well acknowledged Rookie of the Year, Austin continues to show steady improvement. Chris Adams taught him well. He has a promising future if he doesn't suffer serious, chemically induced injuries to his massive muscles.

Most Deteriorated Wrestler Of The Year

Dave: Thomas Rich. Not that he was that good to begin with, but 1991 was not Rich's year. One of life's biggest mysteries is why Rich still has a job with a major wrestling promotion. Finishing second is Colonel Mustafa, who has been deteriorating as wrestler on an annual basis for the past few years. But it was not until 1991 that we were forced to watch him in the ring regularly. Rounding out the top three is Roddy Piper. Here I'm caught between a rock and a hard place because I can't stand his commentary work, but it truly pains me to see Piper in the ring, a shell of his former self. Piper just beat out Davey Boy Smith, who has forgotten every wrestling move he ever learned.

Paul: Lex Luger. The man can work. In 1989, he was voted the most improved wrestler of the year in the Wrestling Observer Newsletter and deservedly so. He has the ability to wrestle, fight and make a solid showing of himself, but he doesn't. He has become lazy and if it wasn't for Ron Simmons, there would have been no interest in the WCW World Title during the last half, and for that matter the first half, of 1991. Rick Steiner comes in second place as he truly earned his nickname Lazy Steiner. Another man with tremendous ability who only on occasion chooses to flaunt it. In third place, Davey Boy Smith. Once

a top caliber wrestler, now a man who has sacrificed agility, mobility and respect for a ridiculous physique and a moderate push in the WWF.

Vic: Ric Flair. After all the hoopla surrounding his WWF debut, he has unfortunately been reduced to the role of just another one of McMahon's stable of heel job boys. He will never win a clean pinfall over anybody above the level of the Brooklyn Brawler. All of our worst fears have been confirmed. We should have known better than to have hoped for more. Bret Hart comes in second. Other than against an injured Curt Hennig, I can't remember the last time I saw Hart in a match which he worked to the limits of his considerable abilities. While not entirely his fault considering most of the WWF competition and overall workrate, I still would like to know just exactly who voted him wrestler of the year. In third, Jimmy Snuka. I know he's been awful for years, but when I think about his 15 foot steel cage Superfly leap, glory days against Bob Backlund and Don Muraco, his final days in the WWF were pitiful and tragic.

Most Underrated Wrestler Of The Year

Dave: Mike Graham. He's not a world beater, but if you're looking for a consistent worker who can get an opponent over, Graham is your man. He's a great technical worker who has years of experience and knows the ins and outs of a wrestling ring. The same can be said of runner up Brad Armstrong. His technical skills are among the best in the world, yet the only way he can receive even the slightest push is to wear a mask and take on a silly name. Armstrong's brother, Steve, and his partner, Tracy Smothers, known as the Young Pistols are also vastly underrated and finish in third place.

Paul: Brad Armstrong. The man can work a match better than at least 90 percent of the wrestlers in the United States, but he is given absolutely no front office support. While there are many examples of what's wrong with the current state of professional wrestling, none are better than the never ending misuse of Armstrong. A talented performer, who, if nothing else, will get over in Japan and make a healthy living there. Mike Graham comes in second place. Everybody moaned about him coming in to WCW and he proved those complaints to be unjustified. Even with his classic seventies bland babyface style, he is talented in the ring and pulls moves out of his arsenal rarely seen by today's supposed wrestling technicians and superstars. In third place, Bobby Eaton. While he did receive a push, well something that resembled a push, he received nothing close to what his abilities in the squared circle merit. I still maintain the man, if pushed properly, would be a credible and marketable world champion.

Vic: Terry Taylor. Although he's a perennial hardcore favorite, he has never achieved mainstream acceptance due to his lack of size and bulging muscles. He's required to do more jobs than he deserves. In second place, Barry Windham. His injury couldn't have come at a worse time. Just when he seemed to have gotten his head screwed on straight, he got a serious legitimate injury. He should have defeated Luger for the title, but it was obvious WCW chose muscles over skill to represent their championship philosophy. A big mistake. Larry Zbyszko gets third place. He's been a favorite of mine since the old AWA days. A good worker, a good heel, a good interview and a good employee who does jobs when required. Nothing fancy, but he could teach the over hyped rookies a lot.

Most Overrated Wrestler Of The Year

Dave: Big Van Vader. After hearing all the hype about Vader's work in Japan, I eagerly awaited to see him work a great match in WCW. I'm still waiting. During the past several months, I haven't seen a good thing from this guy. Truly a wrestler whose reputation far exceeds his actual ability. That statement also rings true for Stan Hansen, my top choice last year and this year's runner up. Thankfully, I didn't see as much of him 1991.

Paul: Roddy Piper. The man can't work. He won't sell. His interviews are terrible. He's a disgrace to what he once was. How any hardcore fan can cheer him is beyond me. Big Van Vader comes in second. The fact that this boring wrestler is as popular as he is in Japan is proof that a gimmick can get over in Japan just as easily as it does in the United States. He is lethargic in the ring and watching him leaves me the same way. Stan Hansen gets third as he is nowhere near as good as he is perceived in Japan or by himself. When was the last time Hansen was involved in a good, let alone great, singles match?

Vic: Hulk Hogan. Hogan expended more nervous energy perjuring himself on the *Arsenio Hall Show* than in any of his matches in 1991. When a wrestler compares himself to Jesus Christ, you can't get anymore overrated than that. I can't hide the fact that I despise everything that he really stands for. Sting gets second. Does anybody really like this guy? His repeated knee injury angles are growing tedious and his punky gimmick is passe. He needs to turn into a major heel to disillusion all his Little Stingers, if they actually exist. In third place, Rick Steiner. Knocking hapless jobbers out cold with stiff clotheslines and a couple of suplexes got boring last year and didn't look all that impressive against good workers.

Best Interview Of The Year

Dave: Paul E. Dangerously. Whether he was conducting an interview or giving one, Dangerously was always entertaining and had something important to say. Until 1991, he would mostly run his mouth without giving much thought to what he was saying. But he learned a great deal in a year's time. Arn Anderson finishes second in this category. From his "gang violence" speech in the Horsemen video in early 1991 to his interviews with the Enforcers, Anderson showed why he is among wrestling's best orators. Jake Roberts finishes in third place for his work since his heel turn. Although the message is somewhat disturbing, Roberts still put in a fine performance.

Paul: Paul E. Dangerously. From his "I'm going to set the American male free" promos to the "I have a Dream" speech to his remarks to Missy Hyatt to his Halloween Havoc shoot remarks to his weekly history lessons, Dangerously has topped a field, albeit weaker this year, that is always competitive. Arn Anderson jumps to number two. From the Horsemen videos to the Enforcers interviews to his current role in the Dangerous Alliance, he is consistently articulate, poignant and eloquent. Bobby Heenan is my third choice. Still funny, fresh and earning the fans' hatred after all these years. A true talent.

Vic: Rick Rude. Intense, well rehearsed and consistent. When he says he will beat the heck out of Sting, I really want to believe him. In second place, Arn Anderson. Another perennial favorite. Every time he concludes an interview with that finger slashing across the throat, I say, "Yeah Arn!" Third place goes to Paul E. Dangerously. For details, see Manager of the Year.

Match Of The Year

Dave: Rick and Scott Steiner vs. Hiro Hase and Kensuke Sasaki, March 21, Tokyo Dome. All four wrestlers pulled out all the stops in this match from the Tokyo Dome. Nonstop action from two of the best tag teams in the world. In second place in the Ricky Steamboat and Dustin Rhodes vs. the Enforcers match from the November 19 Clash of the Champions. Not only was it a great match with incredible intensity, it also had mystery. That match was the best in the United States during 1991. Finishing in third is the War Games from February 24. Although fans could hear Sid Vicious calling certain spots, it was still very realistic and a hot match. This match also made Brian Pillman a top babyface.

Paul: Randy Savage vs. The Ultimate Warrior, March 24, Wrestlemania. While match of the year and the Ultimate Warrior may seem like mutually exclusive schools of thought, this match had everything. Solid work, Jim Hellwig's best, drama, five flying elbow drops that went beyond pretty, Savage's face turn and the entire emotion surrounding the event. There were better matches in 1991, many that probably deserve this spot, but none I enjoyed more. Sting & Lex Luger vs. The Steiners at SuperBrawl gets the nod for second place. I believe the emotional video that preceded helped create interest in a babyface match. Solid work by all four participants, great crowd heat and emotion. It was only marred by a classic Dusty finish. In third place, the most emotional match I've ever witnessed live or on television, Ric Flair vs. Hulk Hogan at Madison Square Garden on November 30. If there has ever been a more intense 10 minutes in wrestling, I have yet to see it.

Vic: Ricky Steamboat & Dustin Rhodes vs. Arn Anderson & Larry Zbyszko, Clash of the Champions. One of the few matches in recent history which lived up to the pre-match anticipation, of which there was much. All four wrestlers worked to the best of their abilities and nobody was disappointed. Jushin Liger vs. Brian Pillman from the Meadowlands on December 27 gets second as anything less than superb would have been disappointed and they didn't let anybody down. Flair vs. Hogan gets third and you can pick any of a dozen identical matches. This gets mentioned for historical purposes only.

Announcer of the Year

Dave: Tony Schiavone. Schiavone didn't have one of his best years, but the competition wasn't stiff. Always consistent and often entertaining, Schiavone wins this award for 1991. Jim Ross finishes second. Many fans consider him the best in the business, but I can't for two reasons. One, he is terribly overexposed. Secondly, he often attempts to take the spotlight away from the wrestlers and shine it on himself. Admittedly, when he is excited about a match, he is among the finest. But through most of 1991, it appeared as though he didn't care about many of the matches he was calling. Vince McMahon captures third place.

Paul: Tony Schiavone. Never overbearing, consistent, good vocal qualities and able to convey excitement when appropriate. In many ways he reminds me of Bob Caudle and that says a great deal. A solid announcer who is the best in wrestling today. In second place, Vince McMahon. He is the best at setting up angles, and when he wants to be, he is easily Jim Ross's equal when it comes to straight play by play announcing. After all these years, McMahon may still be McMahon, but when he's on, he's one of the best. Third place goes to Ross, but in this case it is faint praise indeed. Ross can be one of the best, but when alone and bored, there isn't a more boring announcer in the game. However, there really isn't any competition beyond McMahon and Schiavone.

Vic: Tony Schiavone. Mainly because I am sick of seeing a smug and over exposed Jim Ross win this category all the time. Schiavone is knowledgeable, well prepared and shows appropriate restraint rather than candy coating bad matches with yelling and raving. Craig Johnson comes in second. He's underrated, mostly because he is wasted in the GWF. His two main drawbacks are that he dwarfs most of the wrestlers and sometimes slips into silly, overblown hyperbole like his "Rasta the Voodoo Man!" bit. In third, Bobby Heenan. I insist upon mentioning at least one heel, and Paul E. Dangerously is already listed in the other categories. Bobby possesses a quick wit, which almost makes Monsoon tolerable, but not quite. His recent performance on Prime Time Wrestling when McMahon put him on the spot for intentionally keeping Curt Hennig out of direct competition with Flair was superb. The stuttering, the stammering, the coughing... hilarious stuff! Nobody plays the sap better than Heenan.

Rookie Of The Year

Dave: Johnny B. Badd. The past few years haven't been good ones for producing many promising rookies, excluding Steve Austin, and 1991 was no exception. Out of all the rookies, Badd showed the most promise. In fact, he shows a lot of promise. He is highly entertaining and can work a crowd as well as anyone. The Lightning Kid finishes in second place. Although he does not look anything like a professional wrestler, he works well. P.N. News rounds out the top three.

Paul: Johnny B. Badd. Simply oozing with potential and has a great gimmick. Mark Merro is a hot prospect and shows all the signs of becoming a solid pro. If he perfects his in-ring work like he did his character, he will be major superstar. In second place, Lightning Kid. He looks like a swimmer who had his trapezius muscles removed, but this man can wrestle. Great promise, particularly if the Light Heavyweight Division ever takes off. Third goes to P.N. News. No he isn't great, but he showed more than most other rookies and received a bad rap from the hardcore crowd.

Vic: Lightning Kid. Though perceived as just another jobber when he debuted in the GWF, he really impressed everybody with his high flying, Liger-like leaps. It's refreshing to see such a relatively skinny guy do so well. Johnny B. Badd gets second place, mostly because the pickings were so slim this year. For the most part, he has shown himself to be a competent, ever improving newcomer. Great gimmick too. Van Hammer gets third place, albeit begrudgingly so. He literally doubled his repertoire of wrestling holds (from one to two). How many other wrestlers can make this claim? I'm willing to give him a chance in '92. Although he definitely does not deserve his push, he seems to appreciate it and I think he will continue to improve.

Manager Of The Year

Dave: Sherri Martel. Sherri saved the Royal Rumble title match and was one of the stars of Wrestlemania. She works harder than most of the WWF wrestlers and is able to generate heat for her men. Bobby Heenan finishes in second place, despite the fact that he is retired. He was able to successfully introduce Ric Flair to WWF fans and as always, was very entertaining. Although Paul D. Dangerously only worked two months as a manager in 1991, his impact during that time ensures he will be a top contender for this award in 1992.

Paul: Sherri Martel. Her failed seduction of the Ultimate Warrior at the Royal Rumble was incredible. He turn on Randy Savage in character and her allegiance with Ted DiBiase refreshing. She works hard, puts up with insulting angles and keeps making the fans hate her and her wrestler. Seems to me like all of the qualifications have been filled, and then some. Paul E. Dangerously gets second place. Had he started managing earlier, he might of taken first. Great speeches and hard work at ringside. A talented man who will be the premier manager of the sport, unless Jim Cornette goes back to major national promotion. In third place, Bobby Heenan. What else can be said? If you need a heel to get over, you give him to Bobby Heenan. The rest is Pavlovian.

Vic: Paul E. Dangerously. He wins by a landslide because he rubbed his part work/part shoot ranting and raving insults into the faces of the misguided WCW management with an unprecedented vengeance. He proved to WCW that they need him much more than he needs them. Paul Bearer comes in second as I love his gimmick. It's as simple as that. He has proven to be the ideal animated foil to the Undertaker's zombie-like presence. Madusa comes in third. Aside from Sherri, Madusa is the First Lady of Wrestling. She can hold her own at ringside and doesn't have to be coddled. She is a true athlete who understands the business and can get into the thick of the action without looking foolish. Besides, she's one sexy babe.

Most Awe Inspiring

Dave: Bobby Eaton. Eaton wrestled a variety of opponents in 1991 and never had a bad match. His dedication to the business is obvious every time he steps into the ring. He's a hard worker who never complains. A true professional. Second place goes to Cactus Jack, who puts his body on the line every night. His work is brilliant and his bumps never cease to amaze me. Brian Pillman rounds out the top three. He is among the sport's top rising stars and has advanced so much in the past few years.

Paul: Jushin Liger. Watch him fly. Watch him work. Is there anyone who can do more in the context of a pro wrestling match and make it look credible? If there is, he or she would get my first place vote. Bobby Eaton gets second as the high flier is just so good. The more I watch Eaton, the more impressed I become. I think he is the most consummate worker in the game today. Ric Flair gets third as he is still the man. No one maintains his level of excellence night after night, let alone with Hulk Hogan and Roddy Piper.

Vic: The Undertaker. Perhaps he's not awe inspiring to the cynical hardcores because of his limited in-ring skills, but just look at the expressions on the faces of the terrified children. That's what really counts. Jushin Liger gets second place. A perennial winner who deserves yet another mention for obvious reasons, especially since he has worked some great matches in the U.S. late last year. In third place, Abdullah the Butcher. Abby possesses the most awe inspiring pecs and forehead in the sport. He would be the last person I would want to perform a flying elbow drop on my rib cage. Admittedly a lousy interview, but I am genuinely awed by his presence.

Sidelines

Thanks To Sheldon Goldberg and Vic Stanley for the plugs.

Next Issue will feature our look at steroids that was slated for this issue as our year end awards ran a little long, your letters and more. Don't miss it.

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